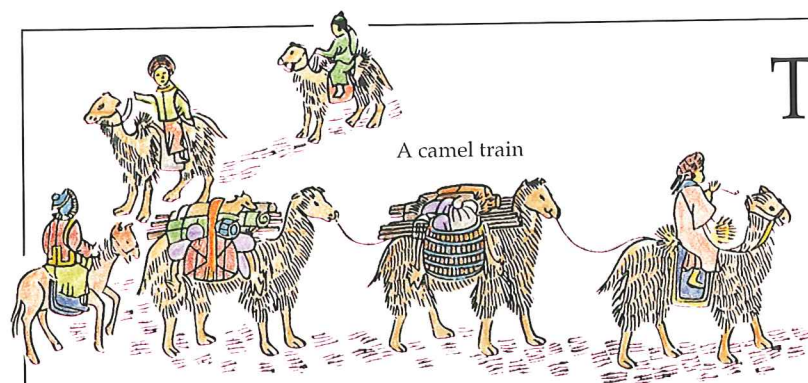


The Silk Road



A camel train

PURCHASING POWER
Chinese silk and porcelain were very popular in Europe. These Spanish silver coins were sent to China in exchange for Chinese goods. On many of them you can see marks where Chinese merchants cut into them to make sure that they were solid silver!



Check marks

NOT ALL EXPLORATION took place over rolling seas. The Silk Road, one of the oldest and most important land routes, was forged around 500 B.C., and was used until sea routes to China were opened up in about 1650. Along this road trade was conducted between China and Europe. Chinese merchants sent silk and spices westward to Europe over the fearsome mountains and deserts of Asia, while gold, silver, and horses were imported to China. However, nobody traveled the entire length of the Silk Road until Marco Polo in the 13th century. The road was about 4,300 miles (7,000 km) long and very dangerous, and nobody knew for certain what was at the other end. It passed through numerous kingdoms where each ruler demanded money or gifts from travelers. In addition, bandits would often pillage a traveling camel train. Because of these dangers, silk was passed from one merchant to another, with no trader traveling for more than a few hundred miles at a time! The Silk Road declined in importance after European ships began a regular trade with China around the southern tip of Africa.



SUMPTUOUS SILK
The most important product traded along the Silk Road was, of course, silk – like this shown here. For centuries the Chinese kept the secret of how silk was made from other nations.

14th-century Yuan dynasty jar

Dragon handles

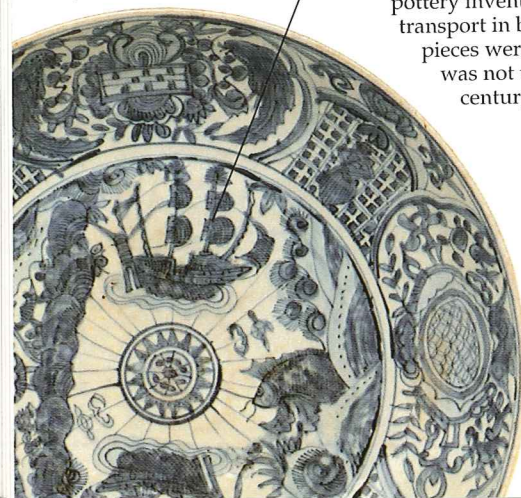


Turkish silver mount on rim

ORIENTAL PORCELAIN
Porcelain is a very hard translucent (lets light through) pottery invented by the Chinese. It was too fragile to transport in bulk along the Silk Road, but some small pieces were traded since it was much in demand. It was not until the sea routes opened up in the 17th century that trade in porcelain began in earnest.

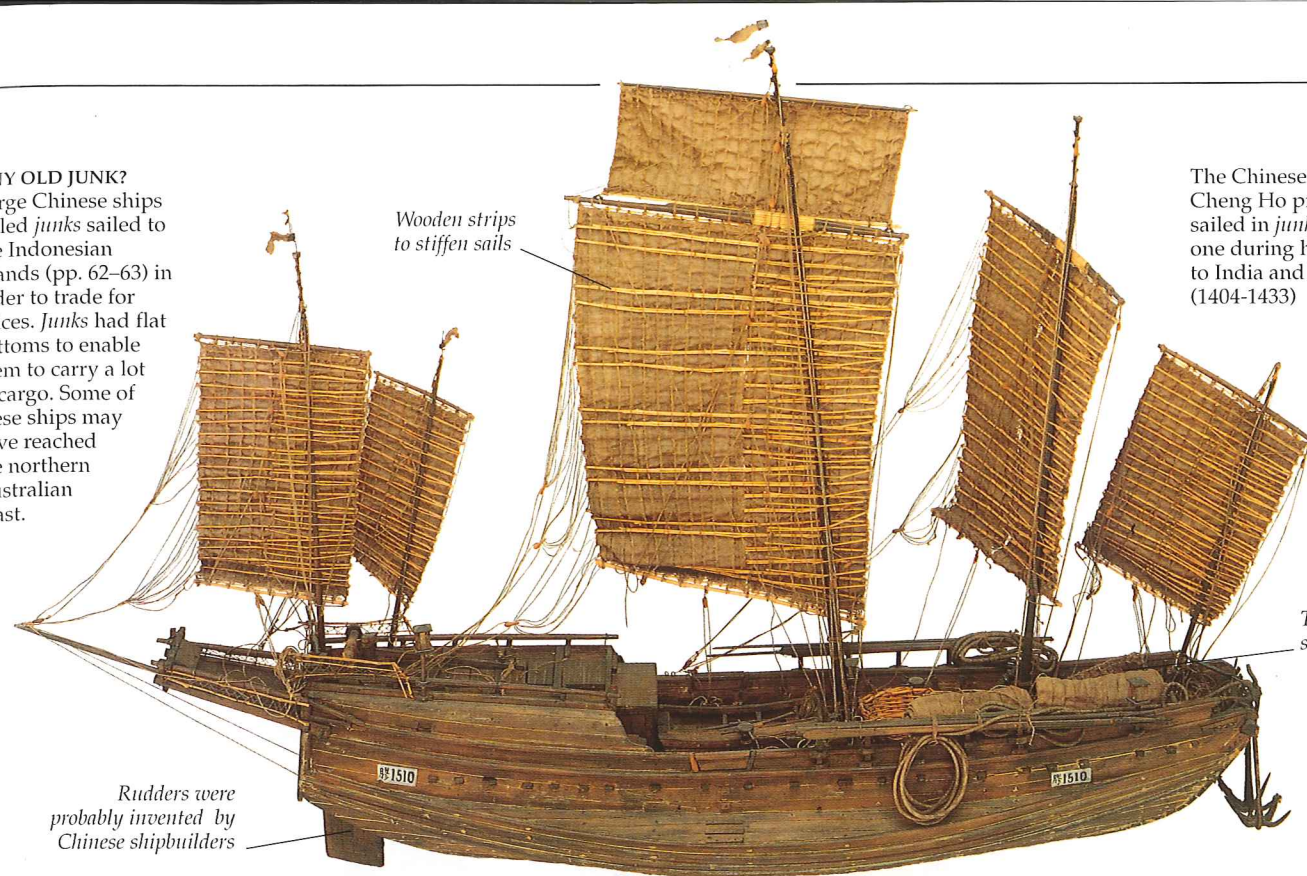


14th- to 15th-century Ming dynasty bowl found in Kenya



16th-century Chinese plate made for trade with Portugal
Portuguese ship motif

ANY OLD JUNK?
Large Chinese ships called *junks* sailed to the Indonesian islands (pp. 62–63) in order to trade for spices. *Junks* had flat bottoms to enable them to carry a lot of cargo. Some of these ships may have reached the northern Australian coast.



Wooden strips to stiffen sails

Rudders were probably invented by Chinese shipbuilders

Two spare sails

The Chinese explorer Cheng Ho probably sailed in *junks* like this one during his voyages to India and East Africa (1404–1433)

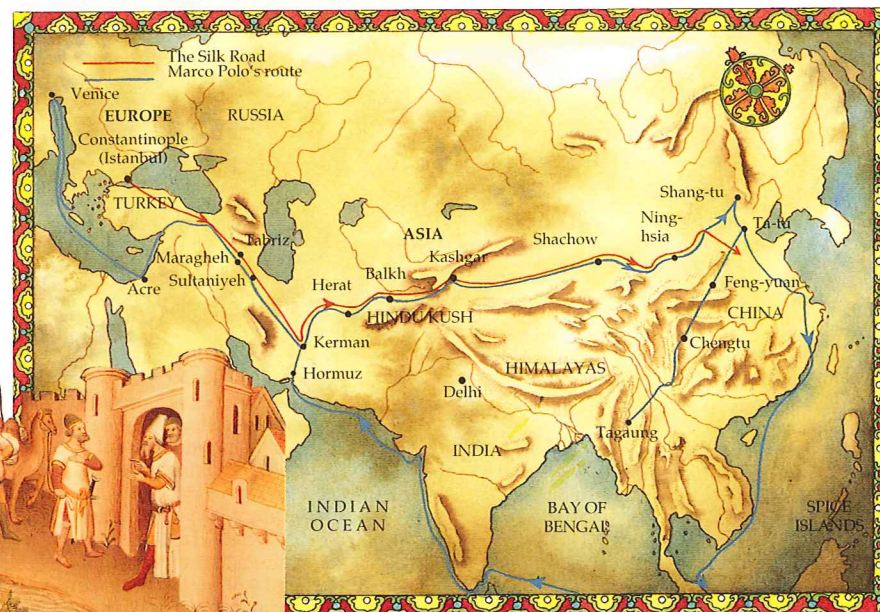


THE RUSSIAN OFFICER
Nicolay Przhevalsky was a Russian army officer who grew bored with soldiering and became an explorer instead. In 1867, he led a military expedition to explore vast areas of Central Asia. He later led four expeditions into unknown regions of Central Asia where he discovered kingdoms and countries previously unknown to Europeans.

This detail from a 17th-century Dutch map shows merchants in the East



MARCO POLO
In 1271, a Venetian merchant named Marco Polo traveled to China along the Silk Road with his father and uncle who had already visited the Chinese emperor Kublai Khan. Marco spent several years in China working as a government official before returning to Venice. This picture shows the Polos arriving at the Moslem city of Hormuz in the Persian Gulf.



THE ARTISTIC EXPLORER
Wherever Swedish explorer Sven Hedin traveled, he sketched and painted what he saw. Between 1890 and 1934, Hedin made several journeys into Central Asia, exploring and mapping new regions. He was twice held prisoner by bandits, and once nearly died of thirst.

